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Letter dated 25 August 1997 from the Permanent Representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing in connection with the letter recently addressed to you by the former Foreign Minister of the Republic of Albania, Mr. Arian Starova, distributed as document A/52/254-S/1997/567 upon the request of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Albania to the United Nations, to express unpleasant surprise and deep disappointment at the array of disinformation it contains.

In the letter, wrongly locating the legal basis of the action of the State authorities in the town of Gostivar on 9 July 1997 and misinterpreting the law of the Republic of Macedonia, the former Foreign Minister makes strange conclusions, with some elements of threatening the very existence of the Republic of Macedonia as well as an unusual "invitation" for involvement of the Security Council. However, what is indeed essential in the letter has been omitted: that the Albanian minority in the Republic of Macedonia, represented by its political parties, has all along participated in the political decision-making process in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, that the largest party of the Albanian minority, the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), has been a coalition partner in all Governments of the Republic of Macedonia ever since its independence and that this party has voted for the adoption of the Law on the Use of Flags of the National Minorities.

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* A/52/150 and Corr.1.

Without indulging in a political assessment of the motives for such allegations by the former Albanian Foreign Minister and with the aim of informing you of what really happened in Gostivar on 9 July 1997 and the days following, I would like to bring the following facts to your attention:

(a) The legal basis for the action taken by the Ministry of the Interior, to remove the flags illegally hoisted by the leaders of the local authorities in front of the town halls was the order of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Macedonia. The Court abolished the decisions previously taken by the city assemblies of Tetovo and Gostivar which enabled permanent flying, in front of the municipal buildings, of the flags of the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Turkey, as unconstitutional and illegal. The action of the police to restore legal order and to remove the flags of foreign States from in front of the municipal buildings took place only after the local authorities were warned several times by the competent State authorities that the hoisting of the flags of foreign countries was illegal and therefore the flags should be removed. However, they have been refusing to implement the court order for more than two months.

It should be noted that the orders of the Constitutional Court enter into force immediately after their adoption. The time of police action coincides with but has neither direct nor legal connection with the date of the adoption of the Law on the Use of Flags by the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia.

(b) The events that followed the unobstructed removal of the flags were obvious results of the political manipulation of certain political groups of the Albanian minority. Those political groups managed to organize a large crowd of people, among them also citizens of the Republic of Albania, in an attempt to forcefully hoist again the flag of the Republic of Albania in front of the municipal building in Gostivar. The crowd, some of them using firearms, attacked the police forces guarding the building. The police, in order to disperse the crowd, fired warning shots into the air, but the ensuing clash between the police forces and the crowd unfortunately resulted in the loss of three lives as well as in the injury of dozens of people, from both the police and the demonstrators. The numbers are high indeed, but they are not even close to the numbers stated by Mr. Starova. The police seized a large number of firearms and Molotov cocktails as well as documentation for the creation of so-called "crisis committees", which is subject to investigation. All of this clearly illustrates the fact that we have been faced with a planned and organized effort by the political forces that advocate radical, instant political solutions through provoking escalation of inter-ethnic tensions. The diplomatic and consular missions in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as the representatives of foreign and international organizations, including the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force have been kept informed on a regular basis. On the occasion of these events, special communiqués were issued by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe High Commissioner for National Minorities, Mr. Max van der Stoel, and by the European Union.

My Government hoped that the recently adopted Law on the Use of Flags, with its liberal provisions that go beyond the internationally established standards in this field (it guarantees the right to unrestricted use of the flags of the minorities in the Republic of Macedonia for private purposes, as well as the

right to hoist the flags of the minorities at public institutions during State holidays), would be sufficient reason for the radical political forces in the Republic of Macedonia and their sponsors to reconsider their position and accept the dialogue offered by the Government for finding solutions and overcoming misunderstandings. In that connection, the recent statement by the new Foreign Minister of the Republic of Albania, Mr. Pascal Milo, that Albanian foreign policy in the past has been characterized by an "aggressive nationalism" as well as that in the future the "relations of the Republic Albania with other countries will not be based upon emotions" is an encouraging one.

The Government of the Republic of Macedonia shall persist in its policy of full respect for and observance of the rights of minorities and their cultural and ethnic identity, guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia. Pursuing a transparent policy, the Government understands the legitimate concern of States for their national minorities in the neighbouring countries, and at the same time expects the same position to be adopted towards the members of the Macedonian national minority in those neighbouring countries. Unfortunately, the content of Mr. Starova's letter exceeds that framework and enters the sphere of interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

My Government has welcomed the stated readiness of the present Government of the Republic of Albania, headed by Prime Minister Fatos Nano, to develop good-neighbourly relations with all its neighbours.

I hope that the facts in the present letter will facilitate the correct understanding of what happened in Gostivar and that you will find unacceptable the requests contained in Mr. Starova's letter.

I would be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under items 81, 112 and 114 of the provisional agenda, and of the Security Council as my Government's reply to the letter of the former Albanian Foreign Minister.

(Signed) Naste ČALOVSKI
Ambassador